

# Black history speech focuses on Carson slaves

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**"I** remember when my old mammy died ... She sick for a long time. One day, the white man came to see me, and said 'Sarah, did you know your mammy was dead?' 'No,' I say, 'But I wants to see my mammy before they puts her away.' I went to the house and said 'Ole missy, my mother, she died today. I wants to see my mother before they puts her away.' But she looked at me mean and say 'Get on out of here, and get back to your work before I wallop you good,' so I went back to my work with the tears a streaming down my face, just a wringing my hands. I wanted to see my mammy so."

## Sara Gudger, slave

James Haney, the speaker at the Burke County Genealogical Society's quarterly meeting Monday, read that quote from Gudger and said, "Sarah Gudger's incredibly sad account of the absence of human compassion at the time of her mother's death was one glimpse of the horror that was slavery."

Gudger was born into slavery in 1816 and served as a slave on the Andrew Hemphill Plantation. She lived to be 121 years old.

Haney additionally spoke of the accomplishments of slaves who contributed to American culture during their life through their success.

Haney, president of the board of directors of the Carson House in Marion, created an exhibit at Carson House entitled "Bondage and Resistance: Slavery in the Up-Country."

"Sometime ago, I became aware that in 1841, 68 slaves spoke of John Carson's pleasant gardens as their home. I knew their names, but that is all I knew about it then," Haney said. "In contrast, much was known and published about the white Carsons and their notable accomplishments."

This realization prompted Haney to research the lives of the slaves of Carson.

"The year 2013 marks the 150th anniversary of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. But as a matter of fact, the process of overcoming slavery in the United States had begun well before 1863 and, to a



Beverly Foster, James Haney and Doris McDonald smile after the Burke County Genealogical Society's quarterly meeting. The meeting hosted a lecture from Haney on overcoming slavery.

great extent, overcoming slavery and its legacy remains an unfinished task," he said.

## The darkest days

Haney quoted Gudger when talking about the buying and selling of slaves.

"Oh, that was a terrible time. All the slaves be in the field, a-plowing, a-hoeing, a-singing in the boiling sun. Ole [master] he come through the field with a man called the speculator. They walk around, jus looking, Jus looking, all the darkies know what this mean. They didn't dare look at him, just work right on. Then the speculator, he sees who he wants. He talk to ole [master] then they slaps the handcuffs on him and they take him away..." Gudger had said. "When the speculator were ready to go with the slaves, if there was anyone who didn't want to go, he'd thrash 'em then tie 'em behind the wagon then make him run and fall to the ground. Then he'd thrash 'em till they say that they'd go on without no more trouble."

Haney shared the accounts of other slaves and their experiences with the speculator before speaking on slaves who attempted to escape and sometimes even revolt.

"Running away was an act of desperation and the cost of failure was high..." Haney said. "There were rare instances when slaves took great risks in rebelling against their bondage."

Haney told the story of Thed, a slave belonging to a Rutherford

woman who was allowed to hire out his labor in the McDowell-Burke gold mines.

Thed managed to organize a rebellion among slaves with the help of two co-conspirators, Giles and Billy.

A week prior to the revolt, Thed told a female friend of his plans.

"His confidence in her was misplaced and she exposed the plot," Haney said.

The three were arrested and jailed in Morganton.

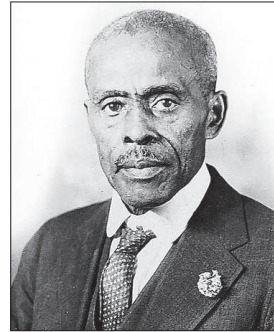
"Subsequently a trial was set for March of 1832 in the Burke County Courthouse. Thed turned states witness and testified that an insurrection was contemplated and that his buddies, Giles and Billy, were the true instigators of the plot," Haney said.

Giles and Billy were charged with conspiring to initiate an insurrection. The two were found not guilty, while Thed was released.

"This was a significant event in the history of the region however, for it makes clear that local sentiment to slaves were by no means passive victors for they were willing to take great risks in the hope of breaking the bonds that bound them," Haney said.

Haney told of the struggles freed slaves faced.

"Slaves had been denied the rights to education by law. The effect was devastating, for education was a tool that enabled people to find their way to become productive contributors to the fundamental structures of community life," Haney said.



Martin California Carson was born a slave and later became an educator.

"Overcoming the educational deficiency was a challenge that virtually every former slave and their children faced against great odds, including extreme poverty, the absence of schools and the inferiority of segregated schools. Some African-Americans overcame this particular legacy of slavery and became contributors to the advancement of American culture in their professional lives."

## Some shall overcome

Haney pointed out the successes of three local men who prospered as free men: Simeon Lewis Carson, William Augustus Greenlee and Martin California Carson.

Greenlee was born to a former slave in McDowell County. His father was a mason who did his job well.

Greenlee attended college and left after a year to seek fortune in Pittsburgh. He went on to serve in the military during World War I. When he came back from the war, Greenlee purchased a taxi cab.

"Influenced by the win-and-take-all and shady business practices of that era, he took advantage of the opportunity of prohibition. Gus sold illegal liquor out of his taxi cab and profited immensely," Haney said.

Greenlee began to invest in night clubs in Pittsburgh before building Greenlee Field in 1932.

The stadium cost \$100,000 and became the "largest stadium ever built maintained and owned by a black man in the United States," Haney said.

Greenlee went on to revive the Negro National Baseball League in 1933. He owned a team and became the president of the six-

team league.

Greenlee sold the team and stadium in 1938.

Simeon Lewis Carson was the son of a former slave. His family relocated to Ann Arbor, Mich., from McDowell County when he was 5 years old.

Simeon was admitted to the University of Michigan Medical School where he received his medical degree in 1903 when he was only 21.

Simeon became a well-respected doctor and worked his way to Washington, D.C.

"After observing racial discrimination in the Capitol, that excluded black doctors and patients from first-class hospitals, he founded Carson's Private Hospital," Haney said. "For 16 years, this hospital was renowned for the excellent medical service it offered to people of African descent from all over the United States."

Carson sold his hospital to Howard University in 1938.

Haney listed the life accomplishments of Martin California Carson.

"In 1862 he was born a slave on the Carson plantation," Haney said, before he went on to become an educator.

"Martin was sent to the state normal school in Salisbury which later became Livingstone College for two years," Haney said. "He then began a teaching career in Morganton in 1883..."

Carson later became a minister.

"Though born a slave and inhibited through his life by racial segregation in his homeland where he chose to live it can be said that to a remarkable degree, Martin Carson overcame the limitation imposed on him by his birth and social status. He succeeded in making worthy contributions in the field of education and religion, especially in the cultural development of regional African-Americans and furthermore he inspired a new generation," Haney said.

Two descendants of Carson appeared at Monday evening's lecture.

Doris McDonald and Beverly Foster were the Carsons' grandchildren.

"It was very enlightening," Foster said. McDonald said that her grandfather left an imprint on their lives.

"He was a teacher ... and we were teachers," she said.